Brookline Mar. 6. 1881
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Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shall be fed.
Psalm 37 - 3

The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.
Prov. 11 - 25 —

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It is one of the standing puzzles of philosophy to find a ~~bridge~~ logical bridge for that gulf which exists - (or seems to exist) - between the inward and the outward worlds. — The mind is conscious of its own existence - conscious of ideas and fancies which are formed within itself, and it is conscious also of an infinite multitude of separate realities outside itself, which are the cause of many of its sensations and emotions. - The philosophical mind by long poring over the problem which the existence of these two worlds involves, and long study of the distinctions between them, comes often to attach most reality to the inward world, - sometimes even to doubt ~~or~~ or denial of the existence of any external realities whatever. - But the ordinary mind - which lives largely in its ~~[illegible]~~ senses tends strongly in the opposite direction, viz. to magnify the outer, at the expense of the inner realm of existence. - ~~It~~ In its ordinary mood. the mind stands perfectly aghast and appalled before any hint or symbol of the vastness and power of the external physical universe. — Let a man stand by the sea-side, and ~~a~~ watch the great waves which have stranded an enormous ship — lift her and dash her upon the rocks — as if she were nothing more than a child's toy, and the sense of his own helplessness in the presence of such resistless might — ~~it~~ will almost paralyze his faculties. — Let him look up to the stars at night, ~~a~~ trying to compute their number or to realize the vast distances which separate them — and he will stand dumb in wondering amazement. — There is no thought so awful and overwhelming as that of an infinite Universe. — As the mind says to itself — "Let me go on and ~~on~~ on for ~~endless~~ numberless years — through these worlds that I see above me, and I should never come to any end of them;" it finds itself struggling to present to the imagination - a picture which its vision cannot begin to comprehend.- Accustomed as we are to think of things by establishing their boundary lines,- ~~a~~ the thought of that which has no bounds - which has no beginning and never comes to an end perplexes and terrifies the mind.-- No wonder that men have cowered in fear before that God who is to them the Ruler of those eternal forces that are frightful in their extent and power.-- When a man measures himself against the Almighty - what can be the result - save to make him feel his own utter insignificance?- In comparison with this limitless ocean of existence about me - what is the force of my will or the strength of my ~~hands~~ hands? I am as one at sea, in an open boat - beyond all sight of land - without oar or rudder or sail, feebly striving to keep my frail craft for a little time upright, though I know that it is only a question of time before the great waves shall engulf me.— —

This I say is what it is for man to measure himself against the infinite, and this is what ordinary habits of life and thought lead to;- Most people succeed in attaining a degree of happiness and content, not by learning to confide in, or to outface, the Universe, but by fastening their eyes to immediate objects – living in the present moment – and keeping out of ~~their~~ the foreground of their consciousness the thoughts of eternity and infinitude,— — When they do lift their eyes to survey the wide spaces of being – and see by what gulfs they are surrounded – they are appalled by the sight – and run for refuge, to the petty interests and narrow conceptions, within which they find a sense of home and security,— — Yet this vast shadow of an infinite reality which they cannot comprehend, looms always in the background of their thought, and throws a chill over all their moods – They dwell under a power – which holds them helpless within its grasp - and let them be as gay or as busy as they will - they can never quite shut that awful fact out of their remembrance. —

There is a better way of living in the midst of an infinite universe, than that of striving to forget it; - I have referred to the apparent gulf between the inward and outward world. - and to the difficulty which philosophy has found in constructing across this gulf a bridge of logic; - *Practically* however the mind passes continually to and fro over this gulf - on the wings of faith - and never dreams of its existence; ~~The~~ Ordinary people - unlearned in metaphysics - laugh at the notion that there is any need to prove the existence of an outward world; - their own eyes and ears are sufficient evidence, and they have an unquestioning faith in the reality - of what these senses report; *This* faith, is the germ of *precisely* *that* power which men needs, to arm him against the terrors of the external universe, - He needs the power to trust in the forces - which, when he opposes himself against them threaten to overwhelm him, - To measure swords with the infinite, - to compare himself in stature - with that which has boundless height, to think of himself as fighting against a power which may any moment that it pleases or chooses crush him like an egg shell - all this is to fill man's spirit with gloom and despair, - But let him instead surrender to the Universe; - let him feel that the tide of being bears him up and carries him on; that God is a Providence and not a Fate; and the vastness of the Universe becomes no longer a source of terror, but of inspiration and strength; - Self against God - is the meanest and most insignificant point of being. - Self - with God is a boundless possibility. — Infinity is no longer appalling when we ~~are~~ are ~~of~~ a part of it, and of kin to the forces with which it is filled. — Let us give ourselves into the hands of God, and we find that blow his winds never so fiercely they carry us always forward ~~upon a~~ upon a voyage which leads to brighter skies and smoother seas. —

What is here true ~~of~~ as between man and the Power which rules the outward world is also true as between man and society. —

Numbers - as an expression of magnitude - make little impression upon the mind - it is true. - The assertion that there are in our country fifty millions of human beings - provides no symbol ~~gives no real ch~~ from which the imagination may gain an impression of what such a mass of humanity really is. — But when we come into contact with a crowd or an army which is numbered by thousands or tens of thousands; when we stand at some converging point of the great commercial highways, — and see something of the great bulk of supplies which these fifty millions are daily consuming - it comes upon us again - what a huge world this world of human interests is - as compared with the sum of our individual influence and possessions, - and how short is the reach of our arm as ~~compared~~ measured by the scope of that force which lies in the will - the needs - or the delusions of a nation.

Here again - to set ourselves over against the world - is to fill the mind with disquiet and discouragement. - To conceive of ourselves as standing in an antagonistic attitude toward the masses of mankind - is to live continually beneath the threat of impending disaster, - What, for example - could we do to help ourselves - if these masses should rise in rebellion against the established order, to make war upon its leaders and supporters? - - We are every day and hour within the power of the mob, and the thought of our helplessness is *terrible* if we see in it our enemy. -- When I conceive of my work in life as an attempt to *extort* something from an unwilling world I am easily driven into ~~madness~~ insanity by my anxieties and fears. - It is such an enormous power with which I undertake to contend, that my success would seem to involve a miracle and I must constantly forebode disaster. - But let me change my attitude - from one of hostility - to one of friendliness - let me cease my attempt to make myself *master* of the world (or that portion of it with which I have to do) - and strive to become its worthy and efficient servant, at once the whole appearance of life has changed. - It is like a ship which has been battling with an adverse wind - turning about in her course - to find the storm become almost a calm, -- When the business man conducts his enterprise - as if it were surrounded on every side by hostile undertakings - anxious to compass its overthrow, he can have no rest or peace, - But when he learns that all mankind are anxious to preserve him and his business therefore - so long as they faithfully serve society's needs - a vast burden is lifted from his mind, - He has not of course escaped all anxiety - some skill and knowledge are still required in the conduct of his affairs, - The Commander of a ship must always be somewhat anxious - in view of the natural perils of navigation, But it makes great difference to him whether these are all the perils he has to encounter - or whether he must in addition - run the gauntlet of an enemy's fleet - where business it is to destroy his ship and save his life. —

The heaviest strain of life comes from the conception in which men imagine themselves to be engaged against the world; that is a position which no man can long hold without danger of going mad from fear — since the world is so overwhelmingly large and powerful — so compared with his own strength. — Let us — so to speak — surrender ourselves to humanity — as we surrender ourselves to God; let us see that the necessity laid upon us is not to fight mankind but to serve them; that to secure food, clothing, wealth, fame — our true way is not to coerce the society but to help it; that thus the main question becomes for each of us — not what we can get out of the world by force or cunning, but what of the best skill and labor and thought we can give the world — let us see all this — and the vaster and wider human interests are - the nobler we shall find it to live in them and make a part of them -. When men attempt to subdue the world and rule it as a master, the result is endless disquiet to their own souls and in the end sure defeat, let it be the matchless genius of a Napoleon - or the keen intellect of the chief of a modern political ring, which makes this attempt; - The world is proven too large a power to be harnessed to the triumphal chariot of any world renowned conqueror, - He who wins from it a lasting reward - can only do so - after Christ's example by loving service of its need, and such desire to give his own life as a ransom for his fellow men, -

We have reached a point from which it is easily seen that the true gospel is a gospel of giving: and that the true way of life is that of *spending* oneself in the service of the good, -- The rewards of life - need not at all *enter* into our anxious calculations, - We live beneath a Providence which has *fixed* the *conditions* upon which true rewards are to be attained - and which no violent clutching, or deep laid scheme on our part can elude or circumvent - Though there are plenty of instances in which - for the moment - men seem to succeed in playing a game against the laws of the world, time brings its inevitable rewards and punishments, - Man cannot cheat God or the laws which He has ordained, All that he need be anxious about is to *fulfil* the *conditions* upon which the best that life holds is to be obtained, - Let him see to it that he does *his work* - then his reward is sure, - It is his business in life, not *to get rewards* - but *to give* that for which heaven ordains a recompense, - Heaven on its part - will not prove unjust, and man needs not to carry on his conscience the burden of any such contingency. Heaven will not prove unjust. Man's only concern is to see that he does not prove unfaithful. —

Having reached this point - from which we see that the word give, is the keynote of the true Gospel of righteousness - let us turn for a moment to religious history to see where and by whom - this keynote has ~~founded~~ been sounded. - / Naturally we shall ~~turn~~ look first to those imposing religious systems - whose priestly orders have possessed great power and fame, and whose ceremonial customs have acquired a hold upon sentiment and imagination which only the changes of centuries can unloose, - And what - shall we ~~find~~ find? - - We shall find that from first to last - the great word of these systems has been - not give - but get, - One and all they have been - not the means by which man ~~gave~~ has given himself to God or humanity - but the means by which ~~man~~ he has sought, to ~~[illegible]~~ open the hand of a Divine power. and secure for business its blessings and rewards.-- Of course there have been devoted men and women under all forms of religious belief - who have given themselves to the service of God and their fellow men; - There were such in early Pagan times as well as in all ranks of the Jewish and Christian Church; - Nor do I mean to say that the great religious systems, have utterly failed to teach the duty of self-surrender - But I am speaking of rules and not of exceptions; of the controlling genius of these systems - not of their accidental or incidental results; and I say, that the one great purpose of their existence, has been to get something out of life - not to contribute to it; - They have been established because man has thought himself under a curse - or ~~he~~ has felt himself unable to cope with the forces surrounding him - and has sought some means by which he might escape the curse, ~~or~~ and secure the alliance of supernatural powers, in his struggle for earthly fortune or heavenly bliss, -

The main features of
These systems have grown out of man's natural fear of God and the World. — ~~The~~ He has measured himself against the infinite — and finding himself unable to contend with it — has sought by confessions and daily homage to propitiate the power he could not resist; — Religious systems have heretofore been shaped — not by the spiritual perception of a wise and loving Fatherhood, — to which it is man's first duty to freely give himself — but by the natural terror of the heart in the presence of forces which it cannot measure nor comprehend — and by its natural instinct to protect itself from the evils conjured up by its own distrust; — Hence the emphasis of all their teaching — the ruling purpose in all their ceremonial has been to show men how they might purchase the favor of heaven — and win an entrance to ~~heaven~~ immortal bliss, — (How is it in the world today? Is not Orthodox Christianity delivering to men everywhere — as her first and last

message - the instant command "get salvation"? - The invitation which the church extends to the world is not - "Come and I will show you how to give yourselves to God and humanity": but - "Come - and I will show you how to save your own souls, - Come and get what I have in keeping, the favor of God, and the rewards which He gives to His saints," -

It is no mere distinction of words that is here made - and these things are ~~said~~ not said in any spirit of theological controversy, - They are said because he who stands as a minister of Christ's spiritual gospel, must declare to men that unless their righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they cannot enter the Kingdom of God. - ~~[illegible]~~, The soul which seeks first or only for itself the blessings of heavenly rest and peace does not find what it seeks. - It is a righteousness of giving - not of acquiring - that opens to men the doors of the Kingdom of God. - and that religious system which turns men's eyes continually to the rewards they are to receive - and teaches them ~~to~~ in all that they do to keep their rewards in sight, must forever fail to reach those heights of spiritual righteousness to which Jesus bade his followers ascend. - Those heights are only attained as men forget that they have anything to gain by obedience to God's laws - and remembering ~~only~~ simply the needs of those about them - find it their meat and drink ~~to~~ to do the will of Him who created them. —

Now in distinction from these religious systems which have had a growth of centuries, and which coming down through dark and troubled ages have been so deeply tinged by the fears of men's natural heart, - there is a phase of religious life which bears the name "liberal" - We hear of "liberal" thought - of a "liberal" gospel - and of a "liberal" movement, which during the last half century has spread far and wide among the people. -

There are liberal people within the older churches, - liberal people who have formed new churches of their own - liberal people who stand aloof from churches. - How comes this word to be applied, in common, to such different classes of people - and what does "liberal" mean? - There has been great effort made to attach to this word a strictly theological meaning, and so when used it is commonly held to signify a condition of mind that is vague - loose - undefined, all-at-sea - in matters of belief - a condition of doubt - that ends finally in atheism, infidelity, and general shipwreck of religious faith, -

But if you will look in your dictionaries you will find that the very first definition there given of the term liberal, the definition given as the primary sense in which the word is used - is - "to give freely"; - That is the true meaning of the word when used in a religious sense, - The liberal movement is one which works men in religion the habit of "selfish asking" and puts men in the attitude of giving. — It is in its origin not a Theological but a spiritual movement. It often involves of course wide changes of belief, but it does not begin with these changes. — It begins when the mind comes to be benefited by Divine power, and learns to trust the wisdom which rules the world. — Once the soul makes that change — it has no longer any reason for the continuous demand to protect man from God; — (which) thenceforth all its effort becomes to give itself to God; to surrender its own will to the guidance of Divine wisdom, and to serve humanity instead of fighting it. —

This is the length and breadth the height and the depth of the liberal movement. — Its gospel is fundamentally a gospel of giving and all its distinctive beliefs hinge upon this central truth, that religion is properly the means whereby man comes to surrender himself to God instead of the means by which he extorts from God some coveted good. — — — You will notice that the two words fear and get always go together, — while on the other hand trust is linked with the word give, — the one is afraid of his Maker, wants above all things to "get" salvation, — the other feels toward God ~~as~~ chiefly a confiding trust, desires first to spread abroad the light that has come to him, and to bring himself and all men more fully under the sway of the good. — He no longer fears and fights either God's power or man's, but finds it his delight to serve, He is no longer anxious about the reward he shall receive (in heaven or on earth) for his fidelity to duty, but knowing that God will take care of that, he makes it his object in life to work for the highest interests of others and to give what help there may be in him for the uplifting of those by whom he is surrounded.

The liberal movement might take for its motto and for the foundation of its creed. The old exhortation from the Psalms, "Trust in the Lord and do good;" [illegible] or that other saying from a later and far higher authority — spiritual things, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all things shall be added unto you." — The belief of orthodoxism is that man is only safe from Divine vengeance, when he complies with certain religious forms — observes certain traditional ceremonies — and professes belief in a certain form of creed. — The belief of liberalism is that whatever established creed a man observes — or fails to observe — he is called upon to give his powers, in the fullest degree, to the service of all that is pure and good and true, and that if he does this — God will take care of him — in life and in death. —

To those who have escaped the shadow of creeds inspired by fear, and have entered into the joy of a larger trust in God's Providence, the movement in our day called liberal - needs no justification. - Its justification however ~~is~~ in the eyes of the world consists in the evident failure of religious systems hitherto, to secure the highest ends of spiritual righteousness - and the necessity for calling men away from a selfish pursuit of heaven, to the unselfish work of making a heaven in every human soul. -- The church loses the spirit of its Master and Founder - falls into shams and corruptions, becomes a cloak for hypocrisy - a stepping stone for worldly ambition, a power which opposes reform and blocks up the path of progress. - Why? Because the church has not cast out that spirit of selfishness, which extends its hands to heaven - saying always "give! give!" - instead of itself giving its own store of what heaven has already imparted - for the world's help and healing, - No system of ~~morals~~ conduct based upon man's desire to secure and hoard up a private good - no conscience which allows him to enjoy his palace - while poverty is starving under its shadow - or permits him to hope for perfect happiness in heaven while his brother is suffering endless torment among lost souls, can foster the growth of pure morality.

When the very religion of men is selfishness what is there to teach them unselfish duties?

What hope of peace in the world while religious ~~faith~~ beliefs put man in a hostile attitude toward God's whole universe, and teach him that he must fight for all he has or hopes for?

There is no higher righteousness save as the world receives this higher Gospel, and men learn to seek good - only by doing good; - It is only the liberal soul that is enriched, To undertake to hoard, spiritual gifts is to starve the spiritual nature, - We therefore proclaim this higher trust in God and this higher duty of self-surrender - not alone for the purpose of making men & women *happier*. and *not at all* with the intent of lulling them into a spiritual sleep. - We charge against *old* systems that they have sought mainly to quiet apprehension and fear, and we proclaim our doctrine because we believe man needs to be roused, to new aspirations after holiness and a new sense of the obligations put upon him, - - - -

It is common to hear the liberal faith spoken of as a *new* faith; but it is not new. It is older than any of the systems of religion opposed to it, as old as the spiritual nature of man; - ~~At~~ In the very dawn of religious history - there was this same effort of the spirit to *trust* God - against what was for long ages an overwhelming tendency of the natural heart to feel nothing but terror in his ~~st~~ presence, -

All through the many centuries behind us you will find the few, who have ~~foun~~ discovered the secret which lies in giving the life to God through service of man - while the masses have *struggled* and *scrambled* for God's favor.- You will find that every great religious organization has been divided by the same tendencies,- A slowly growing power has sought to use them for the teaching of spiritual righteousness - while the vast majority of men have crowded into them only with the intent of finding for their own souls a bridge to immortal glory.—

It is then *the* true gospel - but not a *new* one that we have to preach.- It is the gospel which Moses sought to write upon the hearts of the Israelites,- the Gospel which Jesus, first of all, succeeded in making the world in some measure comprehend, and which he wrote in his own life so clearly that to this day his life remains its noblest expression. this is the gospel of the liberal movement to-day;— It is the gospel which throughout christian history has asserted itself against the tyranny of priestcraft— against the degrading superstitions, which the church has sheltered— and the selfish ambitions that have controlled her counsels;; the gospel of uttermost giving of self to right and truth— to God and humanity; this is the gospel, which is the world's hope of a future— that shall be worthy, the dreams and the labors of great prophetic souls,— —

As surely as God is our judge and Christ our great example, that is for every soul the only way of life; which leads it to trust in the Lord— and do good,— Keeping to this way— the whole question of rites and sacraments and special beliefs— is one of ~~purely~~ merely secondary importance,— Straying from this way of righteous deed and unselfish